



The Right Reverend A. Robert Hirschfeld
Episcopal Church of New Hampshire

To: Attorney Laura Dodge, McLane Middleton, Manchester, New Hampshire
From: The Rt. Rev. A. Robert Hirschfeld, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of New Hampshire
Date: September 23, 2024
Subject: The “Ecclesiastical Purposes” of the Christ Church Project

The Christ Episcopal Church, Portsmouth (the “Church”), owns the property located at 1035 Lafayette Road, Portsmouth, NH (the “Property”). The Church desires to enter into a long-term Ground Lease with PHA Housing Development, LTD (“PHAD”), a New Hampshire non-profit corporation, for the purpose of redeveloping a portion of the Property in a manner that furthers the Church’s ecclesiastical purpose and social justice goals in obedience to the Christian Gospel. “Ecclesiastical” is the word understood in the Episcopal Church and its governing documents-- Constitution and Canons and the Book of Common Prayer— to mean “*of or pertaining to the church.*” The *ecclesia* is the assembly “called together” to represent the Body of Christ in its worship and service. The *ecclesia*, the church, is called to be Christ’s continuing presence in the world.

The Property is currently used and occupied by the following, all which pertain to the church: (i) the operations of Little Blessings Childcare Center, currently owned and operated by the Diocese (“Childcare Center”); (ii) an historic African burying ground (“Burying Ground”); (iii) Christ Church memorial grounds (“Church Memorial Grounds”); and (iv) a multi-use congregational worship/contemplative space (“Worship Space” and collectively with the Childcare Center, the Burying Ground, and the Church Memorial Grounds, the “Present Uses”).

The Church, in consultation with the congregants and Redevelopment Steering Committee, has determined that the proposed redevelopment of the Property, in a manner that furthers its ecclesiastical purpose and social justice goals, while preserving the Present Uses, is the best use of the Property, consistent with the Church’s legacy of its service to the community.

The project will be a collaborative effort with the Church, remaining the owner of the Property under the Ground Lease, and PHAD as the Tenant. In addition to providing a worship space for the observance of religious services in the Episcopal-Anglican Tradition, the Bishop and congregation seeks to share its space to provide the following:

- Affordable housing in partnership with PHAD;
- Healing, and short-term dwelling, and program support for those who have suffered as a result of sexual and domestic violence in partnership with HAVEN. HAVEN is a local non-profit entity that serves women, men, children, and all people of marginalized genders and identities affected by domestic and sexual violence; and

- In addition, the project would allow for the Present Uses to continue, such as providing for the continued care for children in partnership with the Childcare Center. The Church would also continue to honor the memory of those of African ancestry who were enslaved and buried on the Property in the late 17th and early 18th centuries and whose graves have been recognized by the New Hampshire Black Heritage Trail.

We see each of these arrangements as clear and direct fulfillment of our religious commitments expressed by Jesus Christ, whose teachings, recorded in the Gospels, urge his disciples to care and provide for those in need. We look especially to the Gospel according to Matthew where we hear Jesus declare that “as you have done to the least of those in need, you have done so to me.” Matthew 25:31-40. In other scriptural passages, Jesus is explicit that unless we serve and welcome the vulnerable in our midst, we put at risk imperil our participation in the Realm of God. Other passages include the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37); Parable of the Talents in which disciples are enjoined to invest for the sake of God’s kingdom (Matthew 25:14-30); and the gospel ethic to share freely with those in need (Luke 3:11).

These are only some of the scriptural warrants that support the Church’s aspirations at the Property in Portsmouth. They apply to followers of Christianity of any church or denomination. More specifically to the Episcopal tradition are the promises made by every Episcopalian at baptism: to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ; to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves; to strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being.

This project is consistent with the time-honored tradition of the Christian Church, practiced in the name of Christ for millennia, to build hospitals, to provide sanctuary when violence is threatened, to construct schools for the education of children and youth, and to bury the poor with honor and dignity deprived those during their lifetime.

Throughout the Christian Church, both in the U.S. and elsewhere, churches of several denominations are seeking how to fulfil their Gospel mission by re-examining—and renewing—its gospel mission.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/24/business/religious-groups-churches-affordable-housing.html>

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/2021/08/atlanta-affordable-housing-church-td-jakes-development/>

The collaborative redevelopment project proposed by the Bishop and the People of the Diocese of New Hampshire will further the purposes for which the Church and the diocese were established. Indeed, as news of this project has expanded through the state, the response has been virtually unanimous: “This is the reason why I delight in being a member of this Church!” We see this project as already beginning to enhance and realize Mr. John Elwyn Stone’s dream of a vibrant worshipping community that serves the local neighborhood in line with the best and deepest of the Church’s ecclesiastical purposes.



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